Stewardship, Simplicity and Light: A Quaker Meeting House

IARC 484/584  I Instructor: Erin Cunningham
Winter 2016  I MWF 1:00-4:50 pm

Studio Description: In this studio we look to design a Quaker meeting house.

Traditionally, Quakers have explored architecture as a statement of belief. Simplicity, as a key component of Quaker religious practice, extends to meeting house interiors. Often adapted from preexisting structures, like homes, barns and open spaces, meeting houses were unadorned, emphasizing plainness, detail, and craftsmanship. This emphasis on simplicity was coupled with a focus on natural light, as a reflection of their belief in an “inward light,” but also as a substitution for decoration.

Today, this emphasis on simplicity is often translated into a focus on environmental stewardship. Architecturally, this has expressed itself in the use of preexisting spaces for worship, the use of local, recycled, or renewable materials, daylighting and the use of energy efficient technology.

This studio continues in the Quaker tradition of adaptive reuse, environmental stewardship, and equity. It looks to translate the Quaker concept of simplicity into architectural form, exploring how light, materials, and form can create spaces of gathering, reflection, and silence.

Historic Precedent: Buckingham Friends Meeting House, HABS PA-6224-18, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs